

CROWN POINT STATE OF THE CITY, FEBRUARY 6, 2006

The year 2005 was a good one for Crown Point. Starting out under the cloud of uncertainty from the Lake County property tax reassessment and the delay in property tax distributions, the City was able to manage that challenge much better than many other communities in the County. Because the City and the City owned utilities are financially sound and well managed, we were able to keep City services at the high level people expect with no layoffs and no cuts in programs or wages. It is true that some things needed to be delayed until the actual money was available, things such as the City's employee wage increase; but, we came through on those commitments and were able to pay that wage increase retroactive to the start of the year. I thank all of the employees and elected officials for their cooperation and patience in managing that situation.

One needed only to read the local newspapers over the last year to see what can happen to a community when city revenues and spending become unequally distributed. We are fortunate that Crown Point was able to maintain a good balance. We do not have the problem of some of our neighbors where business is trying to push the responsibility of city services onto homeowners and homeowners are trying to get relief at the expense of business. Crown Point is in a healthy balance and that balance is possible because we continue to be able to deliver all core city services at a reasonable cost even while we provide some nice amenities such as our parks programs and New Years Eve festivities to name a few.

We have not been content to just accept this status quo with no future vision. We continue to seek quality commercial development to further improve the balance between property owner and business support of city services. There is much exciting growth in the commercial area taking place along south Broadway and the interest being shown by large developers in the I-65 corridor continues to be strong. A major focus for 2006 will be the downtown area. We have a good start with the revitalization work made possible through the "façade grant" program which is already in a second phase. We are fortunate that we are a city of standards and values. We do not have to settle for whatever comes along because we are desperate. I applaud the citizens of Crown Point and my fellow elected officials for their support of those standards and values.

Our commitment to having standards and values was also demonstrated this past year by the creation of the joint ethics commission and the City's participation with the Lake County Quality of Life Council in the creation of the ethics policies and standards adopted by the City. It is a reflection of the commitment we have that this ethics policy was adopted by the unanimous consents of the Mayor and the City Council, and with the full support of our Clerk-Treasurer. It is important to note that Crown Point, as a city, provided a leadership role in bringing this about with some of our peer communities. That does not happen among governments and elected officials unless there is recognition of a city's reputation as being symbolic of the goals and ideals behind the ethics policy. We should all be proud and take credit in the fact that the Crown Point City administration, the City Council, the Clerk-Treasurer and the City departments and workforce are seen as an honest and ethical government, and that we are not afraid to set standards and declare values. A new initiative for this year is one that you will read about in the next several months called "Character First". We have begun working on this program and with the help of the ministerial association and other civic organizations we will work to have Crown Point carry the honorable distinction of a Character First City.

It is our hope by my administration and your elected officials that we will continue to set an example by declaring we are not afraid to be open and accountable and that we pledge ourselves to high standards. We want to inspire our citizens, our civic leaders along with present and future office holders to these goals. We want to prove that there is a choice of how to do things in Lake County, and that people can have clean government.

A big part of making this successful is to continue creating an atmosphere of inclusion rather than exclusion. That is what we did with the process leading to the adoption of the revised master plan for the City. We made the commitment to an open process and to accepting input from as many groups, organizations, businesses and private citizens as wanted to participate. There were public forums, public presentations, and a robust exchange of ideas. While it is likely that nobody got all of what they wanted, that is the reality of community and government. It is not just government for me or for one of you it is government for all of us. We have to provide the core services that everyone needs while at the same time trying to provide some of the things that people want. The master plan reflects the fact that we need to share. We need to share resources, we need to share planning, and we need to share the physical territory that we occupy as a community. We have achieved a good workable plan for our community. Some of it is mundane nuts and bolts planning and some of it is what might be seen as dreaming. But through it all, we are doing it together and everyone is having a chance to make their impact.

We do not have to look far to see where this kind of cooperation can lead. The City Plan Commission together with the City Planning and Building Department, the City Economic Development Department, the City Council and the Mayor's Office just completed a major project in the establishment of design standards for commercial construction. This process was not easy and it took time. Through it all, everyone participated at a level that showed their interests were the best interests of Crown Point and not self interest. This type of cooperation shows in the relations between the City and civic organizations as well.

This past summer we all had a chance to enjoy the excitement and good publicity that came to Crown Point from the Bulldogs On The Square Project. This wonderful idea was conceived by a volunteer organization called Stewards of the Square. The Stewards raised money, businesses and groups purchased the sculptures, the City contributed some manpower to move and place the sculptures safely. All the fun that was had, all the positive attention that was brought upon the City, the wide range of businesses that participated, all the people from other places who were drawn by this event to visit our city, all of this was essentially free to our citizens. Sadly, there were some people here in town, even some who fancy themselves leaders, who wanted to kill the project, and then failing they tried to organize a boycott of participation. That thinking seems to have had a lot to do with jealousy and some "we've never done that before" type of thinking. You might ask as I did, why do people think that way? What did having all that fun hurt?

I would like to take this opportunity to call on us as a community to learn the lesson of the Bulldogs on the Square. It is not just about you or me it is about us and our neighbors. We have to continue to think like a community which means that at any given time some neighborhood or group may be getting some improvement or recognition or attention that others of us are not getting at a particular moment. Maybe your kids are too old to play in the parks, but providing strong park programming and safe clean accessible parks is something that adds to the whole fabric of community. The same is true for the City's financial support for transportation to assist seniors who are unable to transport themselves. Just because something does not directly benefit us today, does not mean it is not worthy of consideration and worthy of support. We are all better off for sharing our time, talents, tolerance and mutual support.

I am grateful for the continued good relations my administration has had with the Clerk-Treasurer's Office and the City Council. They have been a pleasure to work with. We are able to keep discussions and differences of opinion on a professional level. When we disagree, it does not become personal, and we are able to move on to the next task before us with the best interests of the City in mind. This is a remarkable group of people who are making decisions not based on what is best for them, but based on what is best for the City. A recent example of this cooperation was the painful decision to ask our employees to participate in funding some of their insurance benefits. For a long time, the City chose to fund the full cost of employee health benefits. There was a time when municipal employees were viewed as on the low side of wage scales and therefore benefits were given as compensation. Those circumstances changed over the years and now our City employees receive a level of compensation that is very competitive. We all know that health care costs are spiraling faster than any other fixed cost facing governments and businesses. The modest contribution that was settled upon for the employees and the graduated phase in of the contribution was something that had to be done. It would have been easy for your elected officials, and for me, as your Mayor, to dodge this responsibility and just let things go on as they had been. However, that would not have been in the best interest of the City, or our citizens, as a whole. We set self-interest aside to do what was needed and did it in the most conscientious way possible.

Turning to the accomplishments of our specific City departments, there is much of which we can be proud. Tonight I will mention some of the highlights and suggest to you a review of the various department year end reports for more detail.

The Human Resources Department, in the person of Director, Paula Carey, did a fine job this year. Ms. Carey was instrumental in bringing our workman's compensation costs under control by reviewing procedures and providing training which has dramatically reduced the number of injury claims arising from our city workforce. This means that our employees are safer and healthier, and we are saving money as well. Ms. Carey also worked very hard on the ethics commission initiative and used her talents to coordinate a lot of that effort between Crown Point and the other communities.

The Planning and Building Department saw another huge year. Curt Graves has done an excellent job of running this department. As our City Planner, he works every day with builders, developers and citizens on the tremendous new growth we are experiencing. Mr. Graves has managed this all remarkably well. Looking to the future, we expect the department to be even busier. Therefore, I am planning to try and put an assistant planner into the budget for the year 2007. This would be somebody that Mr. Graves can train to his high standards to share in the work of one of our busiest departments.

The Public Works Department has demonstrated the benefits of the reorganization. We are getting a day's work for a day's pay from everybody, and no one is exempt from working under the current director's management. I have received many compliments on the diligence of the city crews and our Public Works Director, Jay Olson. He and his entire staff of workers are to be commended.

Our Police Department has seen the effects of our growth. We have been able to add four new officers to the Department and have replaced those who retired. Chief Keith Hefner and his team of supervisors have brought sound police standards to the department. I have seen in our police officers and the department as a whole, a higher level of professionalism. I have been told that many of you have noticed this as well. Crown Point remains a safe place to live and work.

For the Fire Rescue Department, I want to give thanks to Gary Huys who recently stepped down as Chief because of some personal and family reasons. I am glad that he is going to remain a member of the department. You have my commitment that the group of people I am calling on to assist in the selection of a new Chief will produce a well qualified replacement and a good leader. We have much to be proud of in the people who serve the City through this department. They are a big part of why Crown Point is seen as such a desirable place to live. A special thanks and recognition goes to the many volunteers for all of the training and man hours they contribute to keeping the City safe.

The Emergency Management Department, under the direction of Sheri Laney, has given another solid year of service to the people of Crown Point. Under her direction and guidance, the department logged a total of 8,622 hours of volunteer service to the City. This was time that did not need to be expended by the Police or Fire Rescue Departments and saved the City a lot of expense in what would have been overtime costs. I also want to thank and recognize Ms. Laney for suggesting the Crown Point Cares effort to help one of Crown Point's own natives who lost their home in Hurricane Katrina and also for her help in the effort to assist the victims of the tornado that struck the Evansville area.

At our Parks and Recreation Department, Director Julie Johnson continues to increase the number of programs available and the opportunities for participation. What we offer through our Parks Department goes out to all age groups. This past year, Ms. Johnson was able to secure an intern, at no cost to the City, who was able to work specifically with senior program development. The New Years Eve Grand Finale and fireworks event was another family oriented favorite. An exciting upcoming event will take place on March 21st. I am pleased to announce that we are the first municipality in Indiana to secure an appearance by the Chicago White Sox World Series Trophy. On that day it will be brought to Crown Point by the White Sox security detail and will be on display in the rotunda of the Old Court House in the City Square.

Our Director of Economic Development, Mr. Frank Mosko, is not someone who is as visible to the city as perhaps others might be. He is important. Much of what Mr. Mosko does takes place in the circumstances of confidential discussions and exchanges with potential developers and businesses considering Crown Point as a location for investment. A lot of this is not something that can be made public on a daily basis. He has been instrumental in working with the Planning and Building Department on developing the commercial design standards, the revised master plan and the downtown traffic and parking study. He continues to be in discussions and meetings on a daily basis with developers and businesses considering Crown Point as their location of choice. His efforts in marketing the City to the business community are already showing results.

Our new City Engineer, Bill Meeks, has been a welcome addition to the city administration. He has brought a level of professionalism and accountability which has already brought us benefits. As often is the case with construction and development, the devil is in the details. Mr. Meeks is paying attention to those details and we are all benefiting as a result. Mr. Meeks is also to be commended for the efforts he puts forth overseeing installation and implementation of the hardware and software for the GIS.

The City's Special Projects Director Donna Daugherty as a part-time position has brought us a lot of results. She did a great job of evaluating the City's use of photocopiers and fax machines and brought us to a solution where the City will realize a considerable savings over the next several years. Ms. Daugherty also was instrumental in getting the Treasured Memories history of Crown Point book completed and delivered as well as the development of the City Welcome Packet that goes out to new residents. Currently, she is starting a review of the City fuel contract and fuel uses to see what savings are possible.

Another area of cost savings is being reviewed by Jim Drackert our person in charge of Facilities Management. His duties have been expanded to include performing a comprehensive review of maintenance and service contracts for all City buildings. We anticipate both long term and short term savings from that effort.

As I prepare to close my remarks, I want to stress how important it is that we all carry forward with a strong commitment to excellence. The most recent population figures for Crown Point put us at somewhere over 24,000 residents. This is compared to less than 20,000 at the last census. We are on track to add perhaps several thousand more neighbors within the next few years. This is a challenge of both managing growth and managing assimilation. Our new friends need to be made aware of why Crown Point is so special, and they need to feel welcomed. The best way for us to do that is by example. I call on everyone to maintain the high standards and values that we have set for ourselves, to extend ourselves as neighbors, to continue the high level of volunteerism and participation that we have traditionally enjoyed, and to show flexibility for considering new ideas and new approaches. Let's keep building those bridges to each other and finding that common ground among us in 2006 and beyond.

I want to thank my department heads and all of the city employees for their support and efforts over this past year. I trust that no one finds me asking them to work harder than I work myself. It is a labor of love for the City and its people. I continue to be humbled by the trust that has been given to me. I assure you that I will continue to carry that trust in the highest regard.

Submitted by,

Daniel M. Klein, Mayor